

Jennifer Brown

30 Belden St, 1st floor

East Hartford CT, 06108

860-207-2244

Dear Chairs and members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Jennifer Brown. I work taking care of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I work for two non-profit group home agencies, Sunrise Northeast and New Seasons. I am testifying in support of HB 6947 because I believe the state needs to increase the amount of funding to our agencies, like mine. However, we need to be sure that we are reimbursing providers with enough funding to cover the true cost of care.

I have been working at both of these facilities for 17 years, 7 days a week, over 80 hours every week. I do this work because I love it. The people I work with are like family to me. We are their advocates. We prepare meals for them, we help them with hygiene, we take them into the community, and we bring them to the doctor. We help them reach a higher quality of life.

I am asking you to support a bill that will reimburse agencies for the cost of a minimum hourly starting wage of \$15 an hour for all direct care workers, and support a wage increase of 4.5 % wage this year, and next year, for all workers currently making more than \$15 an hour.

Yes, I do this work because I love it, but I work 7 days a week, over 80 hours a week because I wouldn't be able to afford my health insurance at my primary job if I didn't. Every

year we have to pay more for our health insurance at both of my jobs. Most of my co-workers work at least 2 jobs just to make ends meet. If we were being paid a fair wage, we wouldn't have to do this. It would also mean turnover would be reduced. This is a serious problem in group home agencies. If we could make a livable wage, there would be consistency of care for the people we work with. There would be familiar faces in their homes instead of a different person every few days. They need and deserve to have caregivers who know what makes them anxious, who know what makes them happy, and who will help them reach their goals in life.

We know you have some tough decisions ahead of you, but a budget should be about priorities. Who is more of a priority than the people who can't take care of themselves and the caregivers who do the work? I hope you will hear our testimony today and understand the importance of the work we do, and why this bill is important for caregivers and the people for whom we care.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.